

MACAULAY'S CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

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whereas Macaulay enlarges upon the difficulty of stating it. The view generally taken by the professional historians of our own day is diametrically opposed to that of Macaulay. Take for instance the views set forth by Professor Bury in his inaugural lecture in 1903. According to him one of the great achievements of the nineteenth century was the transformation of the idea of history which is being gradually accomplished.¹ During the course of the nineteenth century mere erudition was supplemented by the introduction of the 'scientific method'. This movement, which began in Germany, 'gave historians the idea of a systematic and minute method of analysing their sources/ The aim of this analysis was to find out the exact truth about the past, and it led to a new conception of what history was. ' So long as history was regarded as an art', truth and accuracy were matters of minor importance compared to the artistic statement of facts or what were supposed to be facts. But history ' is not a branch of literature '.

The facts of history, like the facts of geology or astronomy, can supply material for literary art; for manifest reasons they lend themselves to artistic representation far more readily than those of the natural sciences; but to clothe the story of human society in a literary dress is no more the part of an historian as an historian, than it is the

part of an astronomer, as an astronomer, to
present in an
artistic shape the story of the stars.

The truth is, history is 'a science, no less and
no more'.
This is a severe doctrine ; it is not universally
received,
but it is so generally received by professional
historians
that it might almost be called the orthodox
doctrine—the
pure milk of the word', so to speak; but it is a
little too
strong for my stomach. After all, when a man
puts his pen

¹ An Inaugural Lecture (1903), pp. 7, 10-11, 12, 16-17, 42,